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# Frequently Asked Questions about Seasonal Flu 2010-2011

## What is the flu?

Influenza also known as "the flu," is a viral infection. Influenza can be a serious disease that causes severe complications such as pneumonia. It can also make conditions such as heart disease or chronic lung disease worse.

## What are the symptoms of seasonal flu?

Influenza and the common cold both have symptoms that affect the throat and nose, but influenza symptoms are usually more severe than cold symptoms. These symptoms may include:

Fever (over 100°F)  
Cough  
Sore throat

Vomiting  
Diarrhea  
Body aches

Chills  
Fatigue or tiredness  
Stuffy or runny nose

Symptoms usually start 1-3 days after being exposed to the influenza virus. Most persons feel better after several days but cough and tiredness may last two weeks or more.

## How does seasonal flu spread?

The influenza virus is contagious and is spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

## How long can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7-10 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

## What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

- Wash your hands often, for 15 to 20 seconds, with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try not to touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

## What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus?

- If you are sick, stay home from work or school and limit your contact with others.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Cough into your sleeve or elbow if you do not have a tissue. Wash your hands.

### **What should I do if I get sick?**

For the quickest recovery from influenza, get plenty of rest; drink fluids like juice, water, or hot tea; and consider a fever-reducing medication, such as acetaminophen (but **do not** give aspirin-containing products to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, including fever). **Do not** give any medication including over-the-counter remedies to a child without first consulting with your pediatrician. If a fever lasts more than 3 or 4 days, see your healthcare provider. A physician may also prescribe certain antiviral medications. These medications may make symptoms milder if taken within 1 to 2 days of when the symptoms begin. However, antiviral medication should be limited to those at higher risk for complications.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- High or prolonged fever
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions

**What household cleaning should be done to prevent the spread of influenza virus?** To prevent the spread of influenza virus, it is important to keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant (for example: bleach).

### **What is the best way to prevent seasonal flu?**

Yearly vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that everyone 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine each year. Vaccination can begin as soon as the vaccine becomes available. The sooner you are vaccinated the sooner you will be protected against the influenza virus. The vaccine will provide protection through the entire flu season. It takes two weeks after vaccination for your body to provide the protection it needs against the influenza virus. Everyone should get the seasonal flu vaccine; however, it is especially important that the following groups get vaccinated:

Pregnant women • Children younger than 5, especially if younger than 2 • Anyone with a chronic medical condition • Nursing home or long-term care residents • People 50 and older • Healthcare workers • Household contacts of persons at high risk for flu complications • Household contacts and caregivers to children less than 6 months of age

For more up-to-date information, please check the Harford County Health Department website at [www.harfordcountyhealth.com](http://www.harfordcountyhealth.com) or the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/).